

appeared from view about six months after his arrival, and the library was dispersed soon thereafter—even though legislation was passed in 1715 to protect it.³

Although this was the only known public library in North Carolina during the colonial period, there were a number of significant private collections of books. In 1734, for example, Edward Salter of Bath County bequeathed his books, “be they Divinity, Law, History or Mathematical,” to his son Edward. An inventory of the goods and chattels of the Reverend Mr. James Reed, filed 26 November 1777 in New Bern, listed approximately 450 books and pamphlets, mostly theological. Probably the most complete private library in North Carolina was at Hayes plantation library in Edenton, which in 1830 included 1,527 general titles and approximately 3,000 law books.⁴

After the American Revolution, several private, parochial, or associational libraries were established in the state. In 1794 the North Carolina General Assembly incorporated the Fayetteville Library Society. Societies such as this were usually organized by a number of men who joined in paying a small annual membership fee in order to obtain a few books, which circulated among subscribers. As the number of books increased, such societies usually sought incorporation by the General Assembly; and if they continued to prosper, the members would usually open a reading room. Between 1794 and 1848 thirty-two such library societies were incorporated by the General Assembly.⁵

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Charles C. Jewett, librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, enumerated the following libraries in the state: 11,847 volumes at the University of North Carolina, 1,200 volumes at Davidson College, 3,000 volumes in the State Library at Raleigh, 1,500 volumes at Fayette Academy in Salem, 1,500 volumes at the Mission School Library in Valle Crucis, and 4,700 volumes in the Wake Forest College libraries. Nevertheless, “Calamus,” writing to the Raleigh *Spirit of the Age* in 1859, observed that the census of 1850 implied more ignorance in North Carolina in proportion to population than in any other state in the Union.⁶

As the nineteenth century progressed, the situation did not improve markedly. In 1886 State Librarian James C. Birdsong informed the U.S. commissioner of education that there were